

Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05 L-02

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USIA-06 OMB-01 IO-10 AID-05 IGA-01 EB-04 COME-00

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R 080530Z NOV 74

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1409

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC

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S E C R E T VIENTIANE 8281

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MASS, MOPS LA

SUBJ: TALK WITH ACTING DEFENSE MINISTER

IN THE COURSE OF A LONG TALK ON NOVEMBER 7 WITH MINISTER OF FINANCE NGON SANANIKONE WHO IS ACTING AS DEFMIN IN SISOUK'S ABSENCE, I HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO REVIEW A VARIETY OF POLITICAL AND MILITARY PROBLEMS.

1. STATE OF FAR. I TOLD NGON THAT I BELIEVED ONE OF THE MOST SERIOUS PROBLEMS FACING THE VIENTIANE SIDE WAS THE DETERIORATION OF MORALE WITHIN FAR AND WHAT APPEARED TO US TO BE ITS CONTINUING LOSS OF CAPABILITY. TOO MANY OFFICERS WERE ENGAGED IN COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES AND WE NOTED A SLOPPINESS AND INATTENTION OF DUTY AT ALL LEVELS. I SUGGESTED TO NGON THAT DURING THE WEEKS IN WHICH HE SERVES AS ACTING DEFENSE MINISTER, HE MIGHT WISH TO BE BRIEFED BY FAR ON ITS DEMOBILIZATION PLANS, AND I SAID THAT I HOPED HE WOULD MAINTAIN PRESSURE ON
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THE STAFF TO PURSUE THIS PROGRAM VIGOROUSLY. NGON

SAID THAT HE WAS ONLY TOO WELL AWARE OF SCANDALS INVOLVING MILITARY PERSONNEL. DURING HIS TENURE AS ACTING MINISTER, THERE WAS NOTHING HE COULD DO ABOUT IT BUT HE WOULD PURSUE THE SUBJECT OF DEMOBILIZATION WITH FAR.

2. RATIONS FOR FAR. I TOLD NGON THAT IT WAS CERTAINLY NOT REPEAT NOT OUR DESIRE TO ADD TO THE PROBLEMS OF THE VIENTIANE SIDE BUT THAT IT WAS ESSENTIAL THAT THE FAR BE MANAGED AUSTERELY IN THE FUTURE. I INFORMED HIM THAT THE DATT IS CURRENTLY REVIEWING THE RATIONS BEING PROVIDED FAR AND THAT WE HAD ALREADY REACHED AGREEMENT ON SOME QUESTIONS SUCH AS THE PURCHASE IN THE FUTURE BY FAR AT ITS EXPENSE OF LOCAL PRODUCE. WE WERE ALSO DISCUSSING ADJUSTMENTS IN THE RICE RATION. I STRESSED THAT WE WISHED TO BE SENSIBLE AND FLEXIBLE BUT THAT WITH LAOS UNDER MAP WE WOULD BE FACING INCREASED STRINGENCY IN FUNDING. NGON SAID HE UNDERSTOOD PERFECTLY AND THAT HE HAD ALREADY HEARD FROM GENERAL KOU PRASITH THAT THESE TALKS WERE UNDER WAY. KOU PRASITH WAS WORRIED THAT THIS TALK OF REDUCTIONS INDICATED A REDUCTION IN THE U.S. COMMITMENT TO FAR AND THE VIENTIANE SIDE. I ASSURED NGON THIS WAS NOT THE CASE AND THAT OUR INTEREST LAY SOLELY IN ACHIEVING TIDIER MANAGEMENT OF U.S.-PROVIDED RESOURCES. NGON COMMENTED IN PASSING THAT HE WAS DOING HIS UTMOST TO REDUCE CORRUPTION IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE AND THAT HIS PATHET LAO SECRETARY OF STATE WAS CURRENTLY REVIEWING A PROPOSAL HE HAD MADE FOR THE TRANSFER OF ABOUT TEN DISHONEST ACCOUNTANTS AND INSPECTORS.

3. PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG. NGON AND I HAD A LONG AND INCONCLUSIVE DISCUSSION OF THE POLICY BEING PURSUED BY PRINCE SOUPHANOUVONG AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN PUT UNDER INCREASED PRESSURE BY HANOI AND/OR THE PATHET LAO CENTRAL COMMITTEE DURING HIS RECENT PROLONGED ABSENCE FROM LUANG PRABANG. NGON STATED THAT ACCORDING TO HIS BAMBOO TELEGRAPH, SOUPHANOUVONG HAD BEEN ROUNDLY CRITICIZED BY THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE FOR FAILING TO ACHIEVE MANY OF THE

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OBJECTIVES OF THE PATHET LAO. HE SAID THAT ACCORDING TO THIS THEORY THE PATHET LAO CENTRAL COMMITTEE REALLY EXPECTED A POPULAR UPRISING IN SUPPORT OF THEIR MOVEMENT WHEN SOUPHANOUVONG FIRST ARRIVED IN VIENTIANE LAST JUNE. SINCE THEN THE STATURE AND AUTHORITY OF THE PATHET LAO HAS FAILED TO INCREASE AND SOUPHANOUVONG HAS BEEN GIVEN ONE MORE CHANCE TO GET THINGS ROLLING. I SAID I FOUND THIS THEORY VERY HARD TO ACCEPT IN THAT

SOUPHANOUVONG WAS BY FAR AND AWAY THE MOST CELEBRATED PERSONAGE IN THE RANKS OF THE PATHET LAO, BUT THAT THE IMPRESSION GIVEN BY SOUPHANOUVONG AT THE VARIOUS RECEPTIONS AND CELEBRATIONS WE HAD ATTENDED TOGETHER RECENTLY WAS OF A MAN WHO SEEMED TROUBLED BY SOMETHING. I THEORIZED THAT PHOUMI'S TRIP TO NEW YORK, MOSCOW, PEKING AND HANOI MIGHT WELL HAVE INCREASED HIS STATURE IN THE PATHET LAO CIRCLES AND THAT IN MY VIEW THIS ASSOCIATION WITH WORLD LEADERS COULD HARDLY HELP BUT ENHANCE PHOUMI'S STANDING VIS-A-VIS THE MILITANT CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS WHO HAVE REMAINED IN THE CAVES. NGON AGREED WITH THIS THEORY AND COMMENTED THAT HE HAD BEEN IMPRESSED BY THE DEGREE TO WHICH PHOUMI AND MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS SINGKAPO WERE GETTING ALONG WITH THE AMERICANS.

4. PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE. I COMMENTED THAT WE AMERICANS HAD FIGURED LESS PROMINENTLY THAN IN THE PAST IN THE RECENT SPATE OF COUP RUMORS. NGON SAID THAT SOME OF THE TENSION IN RECENT DAYS HAD BEEN ENGENDERED BY PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE ACTIVITIES BY FAR. I SAID THAT IN MY VIEW THIS TYPE OF ACTIVITY WAS SILLY AND WAS CONTRARY TO HIS OBJECTIVES AND OURS. NGON AGREED AND GAVE ME THE IMPRESSION THAT HE WOULD HAVE THIS KIND OF THING STOPPED.

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